

**For:** State Offices and Service Centers

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**Preparations for CRP Signup 20**

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**Approved by:** Deputy Administrator, Farm Programs



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**1 Overview**

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**A****Background**

The next general signup, 20, is being developed to continue acceptance of offers of environmentally sensitive acreage for new 10- to 15-year contracts to cost-effectively enroll acreage for program year 2001.

As during previous general signups, the continuous signup provisions will be offered concurrent with the general signup 20 period. For program administration purposes, the continuous signup number will change from signup 19 to signup 21 for CRP-1's offered on or after October 1, 1999.

No decision has been made regarding the number of acres to be enrolled during signup 20. The number of acres accepted will be determined after signup 20 concludes based on the environmental benefits and the cost of the acres offered. It is anticipated that the CRP offer process for signup 20 will continue to be highly competitive. The national EBI cutoff score will be determined after the signup concludes. The signup 20 EBI cutoff score may be equal to, higher than, or lower than the cutoff score for previous signups.

The signup dates for general signup 20 will be announced later.

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**Disposal Date**

April 1, 2000

**Distribution**

State Offices; State Offices relay to Service Centers and NRCS State Offices; FS, 80; CSREES, 5

## Notice CRP-345

### 1 Overview (Continued)

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#### B

##### Setting Priorities

Workload activity for FSA and NRCS will be significant in certain areas because of the large number of acres anticipated to be offered for enrollment or reenrollment. State Offices and Service Centers shall set workload priorities and plan office activities accordingly.

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#### C

##### Purpose

This notice provides information about:

- reviewing established C/S rates
  - continuous signup provisions beginning October 1, 1999
  - State ranking plans
  - determining total county cropland for signup 20
  - the 25 percent cropland limitation
  - deadline to approve CRP-1's for signup 18
  - review of items for EBI subfactors N1a and N1b
  - review and approval process for CP25, Rare and Declining Habitat
  - other general information.
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#### D

##### Exhibit 1

Exhibit 1 provides key completion dates in preparing for signup 20.

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### 2 C/S Rates

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#### A

##### General Guidance

2-CRP, Part 19, provides guidance to State Offices and Service Centers for establishing CRP C/S rates. Practice requirements and either flat rates or percent of actual cost levels, not to exceed a dollar limitation per unit measure, shall be established according to 2-CRP, Part 19. Since signup 18, there may have been significant changes in seed and material prices. The most current market prices must be used when establishing C/S rates for signup 20.

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## 2 C/S Rates (Continued)

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### B

#### Rate Review

The cost of eligible items for C/S may also have changed since the rates were established before CRP signup 18. If not already completed, State Offices and Service Centers must:

- review current C/S rates to ascertain their accuracy
- base flat rates or limitations on documented average costs
- use percent of cost levels only if there is no data or there is considerable variation in actual costs across a State or county.

**Note:** Use existing FSA and NRCS average cost lists as supporting flat C/S rates. Rates similar to ACP or EQIP C/S (but not incentive) rates may be used.

In States where the Service Center established C/S rates, the State FSA Office:

- or designee, shall review all C/S rates to ensure that the C/S rates are consistent across county boundaries
- shall review all C/S rates to ensure that the C/S rates are consistent across district and State boundaries.

**Important:** State Offices are not authorized to delegate the authority to review C/S rates across district and State boundaries, including delegation to DD's.

Reviews shall be completed and rates updated, where appropriate, before January 1, 2000.

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### C

#### Rate Consistency

When establishing CRP C/S rates, average costs for the same practice components should be the same regardless of the C/S program. Rates for similar practices should be similar. State and local FSA, NRCS Offices, conservation districts, and the State Forestry Agency are encouraged to coordinate C/S rate determinations to ensure consistency.

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## Notice CRP-345

### 3 Continuous Signup Provisions

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#### A

##### Continuous Signup 21 Period

2-CRP, paragraph 98, provides that CRP continuous signup numbers shall change at the beginning of each FY. For FY 2000, October 1, 1999, through September 30, 2000, the continuous signup number shall be 21.

**Note:** The program year is the FY in which the first payment is earned.

**Example:** Producer submitted an offer for CP21 on July 30, 1999. COC approved CRP-1 on August 20, 1999. Producer defers the effective date of CRP-1 to November 1, 1999. The program year for the contract is 2000.

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#### B

##### Concurrent Signups

General signup 20 will be held concurrently with continuous signup 21. Service Centers shall process offers of acreage under the continuous signup provisions during the general signup 20 period.

Continuous signup 21 may begin before general signup 20 begins. State Offices and Service Centers shall ensure that CRP-2's and CRP-1's provide the correct signup number.

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### 4 State Ranking Plans

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#### A

##### Developing State Ranking Plans

2-CRP, paragraph 128, provides that STC's, in consultation with State Technical Committee, may implement a State ranking plan rather than use the national ranking plan. However, no States have opted to implement a State ranking plan since signup 13. Further, an interagency group including State and local level representatives recommended that State ranking plans not be permitted for signup 20.

Therefore, **for signup 20, State ranking plans are not authorized.** All States shall use the national ranking plan. All eligible offers will be processed at the National Office using the national ranking plan.

**Note:** State Offices are **not** required to submit a memorandum indicating that the national ranking plan will be used.

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## 5 County Cropland Limitation

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### A

#### Background

2-CRP, Part 12, contains information about the county cropland limitation. The Food Security Act of 1985, as amended, requires that USDA not enroll more than 25 percent of the total cropland in a county in CRP and WRP, unless the Secretary determines **both** of the following:

- the action would not adversely affect the local economy of the county
- producers in the county are having difficulties complying with conservation plans.

2-CRP, paragraph 255, requires that STC's notify CEPD of the counties approved for a waiver of the 25 percent cropland limitation before signup begins. Recently, in response to a congressional inquiry, State Offices submitted reports of the counties approved by STC for a waiver of the 25 percent cropland limitation for signup 18 which indicated that many STC's did not report all of the counties that were granted a waiver of the 25 percent cropland limitation. Further, review of STC waivers of the 25 percent cropland limitation frequently indicated that **both** statutory requirements for granting the waivers have not been met.

For signup 20, therefore, **all** requests for waivers of the 25 percent cropland limitation must be submitted to DAFP for a determination. STC's shall not waive the 25 percent cropland limitation.

The total county cropland acreage amount is maintained in the County FSA Office's CRP contract software. The software compares the acreage enrolled in CRP and WRP, excluding the CRP acreage that is scheduled to expire in the current FY, to the total cropland acreage administratively located in the county.

Software will **not** exclude the CRP acreage that is scheduled to expire on September 30, 2000, until after September 30, 1999. Procedure for determining the 25 percent cropland limitation will be issued in a future notice.

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### B

#### Provisions for Signup 20

**Waivers of the 25 percent cropland limitation previously approved for any other signup are not effective for signup 20.**

Depending on the amount of acreage that is scheduled to expire on September 30, 2000, counties that approach or exceed the 25 percent cropland limitation may only be eligible to accept offers under continuous signup provisions and for land that is physically located in a county that has not reached or exceeded the 25 percent cropland limitation.

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5 County Cropland Limitation (Continued)

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**B**

**Provisions for  
Signup 20  
(Continued)**

For signup 20, the cropland limitation shall continue to be determined by the total cropland administratively located in the county. However, Service Centers shall process offers from eligible producers **only** if the acreage being offered is **physically** located in a county that has **not** reached or exceeded the 25 percent county cropland limitation.

Offers for land that is physically located in a county which has reached or exceeded the 25 percent cropland limitation shall be rejected by COC unless a waiver of the 25 percent cropland limit has been approved **by DAFP** for the county where the land is physically located **before** the signup period begins.

**Notes:** Unless a waiver is approved by DAFP before signup begins, COC's shall immediately notify producers that submit an offer for land physically located in a county that has reached or exceeded the 25 percent cropland limitation that the offer is rejected using CRP-26. See 2-CRP, Exhibit 12.

Service Centers shall **not** transmit offers to the State Office that are rejected by COC.

The administering Service Center shall verify **both** of the following before processing an offer:

- physical location of the land being offered
  - that the county where the land being offered is physically located has not reached or exceeded the 25 percent cropland limitation or the county was approved **by DAFP** for a waiver **before** the signup period began.
- 

**C**

**Determining  
Total County  
Cropland for  
Signup 20**

For signup 20, the total county cropland used to determine the 25 percent cropland limitation will be determined by the cropland total maintained in the System/36 Farm Summary File. Procedure for determining the total county cropland will be issued in a future notice.

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## 6 Approving CRP-1's for Signup 18

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### A

#### Deadline to Approve CRP-1's and Complete Conservation Plans

Notice CRP-336 provided that all:

- eligible signup 18 CRP-1's must be approved and entered into the System/36 by September 30, 1999
- final conservation plans prepared by NRCS and the producer must be completed and approved by COC before August 30, 1999.

For signup 18 CRP-1's, conservation plans **must** be completed, CRP-1's approved by COC, and data entered into the automated system by September 30, 1999. All requirements for approving CRP-1's, according to 2-CRP, including a paid-for measurement service and an approved conservation plan, shall be met **before** COC approves CRP-1's.

All CRP-1's must be a minimum of 10 years in length. For signup 18, producers that do not have CRP-1's approved by October 1, 1999, will not have a 10-year CRP-1. Any signup 18 CRP-1 not approved by October 1, 1999, must be terminated without assessment of liquidated damages.

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### B

#### Coordinating Efforts

County FSA and NRCS Field Offices shall:

- work together to ensure that **all** eligible signup 18 CRP-1's and conservation plans are completed, including all required signatures, and approved by September 30, 1999
- contact the appropriate State Office if additional resources are needed to ensure that conservation plans and CRP-1's are completed by September 30, 1999.

State FSA and NRCS Offices shall coordinate efforts and resources to ensure that all eligible signup 18 CRP-1's are timely approved according to subparagraph A.

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## 7 FSA and NRCS Review of EBI Factors

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### A Reviewing Subfactor N1a Cover

For signup 18, State FSA Offices assembled teams consisting of representatives from FSA, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and/or State Wildlife Agency, and State Forestry Agency to develop specific vegetation options to identify and evaluate benefits of eligible cover practices on wildlife for subfactor N1a. These wildlife covers were to be tailored to represent the wildlife needs in the State.

The specific vegetation options should have provided maximum flexibility in the types and availability of cover mixes in the State.

Recent OIG audits and other reports have indicated that further review and development of the specific vegetation options available to producers for signup 20 is required.

In preparation for signup 20, State FSA Offices shall assemble teams consisting of representatives from FSA, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or State Wildlife Agency, and State Forestry Agency to develop **specific** vegetation options to identify and evaluate benefits of eligible cover practices on wildlife for subfactor N1a. **These vegetation options must include, at a minimum, items such as seeding rates (pounds PLS per acre), establishment criteria, and types and varieties of seed and seed mixtures.**

Teams must develop **several** vegetation mixes for signup 20 that will meet the criteria of EBI, provide producers with multiple choices, and help control seed costs. These vegetation mixes **must** be reviewed across State boundaries to ensure consistency.

**Important:** Where practical, as determined by NRCS, State certified seed shall be used for CRP. However, common seeds, especially for natives, may be used when certified seed is **not** available. **Hand collected seed is not authorized for CRP under any circumstances regardless of FOTG standards.**

Based on recommendations from an interagency group of State and local level representatives and a National level interagency working group, native prairie restoration mix has been removed from CP2. Further, CP4B and CP4D have been modified. The State level teams shall use the following table to develop specific seeding mixes for CP4B and CP4D.

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7 FSA and NRCS Review of EBI Factors (Continued)

**A**  
**Reviewing**  
**Subfactor N1a**  
**Cover**  
**(Continued)**

Practice	Assigned Point Score
<b>CP4B Permanent wildlife habitat (corridors), noneasement</b>	
<p>Mixed stand (minimum of 4 species) of either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at least 2 introduced grasses and at least 1 tree, shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area</li> <li>at least 2 shrub or tree species and at least 1 introduced grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area.</li> </ul> <p>A wildlife plan must be developed with the participant.</p>	40
<p>Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at least 2 native grasses and at least 2 tree, shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area</li> <li>at least 2 shrub or tree species and at least 2 native grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area.</li> </ul> <p>A wildlife plan must be developed for the participant.</p>	50
<b>CP4D Permanent wildlife habitat (corridors), noneasement</b>	
<p>Mixed stand (minimum of 4 species) of either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at least 2 introduced grasses and at least 1 tree, shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area</li> <li>at least 2 shrub or tree species and at least 1 introduced grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area.</li> </ul> <p>A wildlife plan must be developed with the participant.</p>	40
<p>Mixed stand (minimum of 5 species) of either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>at least 2 native grasses and at least 2 tree, shrub, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area; or</li> <li>at least 2 shrub or tree species and at least 2 native grass, forb, or legume species best suited for various wildlife species in the area.</li> </ul> <p>A wildlife plan must be developed for the participant.</p>	50

**Reminder:** CP20 was removed in 2-CRP (Rev. 3), Amendment 14.

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7 FSA and NRCS Review of EBI Factors (Continued)

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**A**

**Reviewing  
Subfactor N1a  
Cover  
(Continued)**

State FSA Office **must** submit the developed vegetation options by COB November 1, 1999, for review and approval to:

Director, CEPD, Attn: Mike Linsenbigler  
USDA/FSA/CEPD/STOP 0513  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-0513.

The developed options **must** be approved before signup 20 begins or they shall **not** be used.

**Note:** If, after a thorough review of the vegetation options established for signup 20, the team does not recommend any changes, the State FSA Office **must** submit a copy of the vegetation options approved for signup 18, with a statement that no new options were developed. However, changes may be required after review of the options by the National Office.

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**B**

**Reviewing  
Subfactor N1b  
Cover/Matrix**

For signup 18:

- subfactor N1b of EBI required development of a yes/no matrix to evaluate the expected benefits of the eligible cover practices on Federal- or State-listed T&E, and candidate species
  - all offers were awarded at least 5 points for subfactor N1b because of geopolitical boundary inconsistencies.
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7 FSA and NRCS Review of EBI Factors (Continued)

**B**  
**Reviewing**  
**Subfactor N1b**  
**Cover/Matrix**  
**(Continued)**

To prepare for signup 20, State FSA Offices and State NRCS Offices must meet with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and State Wildlife Agency to review, develop, or revise, as applicable, a yes/no matrix table that identifies Federal- and State-listed T&E plant and animal species and the associated practices and covers according to the following table.

Expected Cover Benefits	Points
No benefit to Federal- or State-listed T&E species (plant or animal).	0
Cover to be established provides either of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• habitat best suited and beneficial for Federal- or State-listed T&amp;E resident (non-migratory) plant or animal species</li> <li>• suitable and beneficial cover within 1 miles of the nesting or wintering site of Federal- or State-listed T&amp;E migratory species, such as the Peregrine Falcon.</li> </ul>	15
For Federal- or State-listed T&E aquatic species (plant or animal), multiply factor N2c by 0.4 for N1b (point score cannot exceed 15). Round to the nearest whole number.	0 to 15

**Note:** The practice and cover must provide a habitat and/or nesting or wintering cover for the threatened and endangered species.

**Important:** The 5-point category for subfactor N1b has been removed.

The developed matrix table shall be submitted by COB November 1, 1999, for review and approval to:

Director, CEPD, Attn: Mike Linsenbigler  
USDA/FSA/CEPD/STOP 0513  
1400 Independence Ave, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-0513.

After approval by the National Office, State FSA Offices shall immediately provide NRCS State Offices with the approved matrix labeled "Signup 20 Threatened and Endangered Species Matrix." NRCS State Offices shall provide NRCS Field Offices with the approved matrix.

After the approved signup 20 matrix is received, the District Conservationist shall write "Signup 18 N1b Cover/Matrix" on the matrix used for signup 18.

**Important:** Do not destroy or discard the matrix used for signup or 18. Maintain a copy in the NRCS Field Office until further notice.

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7 FSA and NRCS Review of EBI Factors (Continued)

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**C**

**Updating  
Lookup Tables  
for Subfactors  
N2b, N2c, and  
N5a**

The lookup tables for subfactors N2b, N2c, and N5a must be updated to include "Signup 20" in the table header.

NRCS Field Offices shall:

- write "Signup 18" on the previous lookup tables
- not destroy or discard the previous tables.

**Note:** Maintain the previous tables until further notice.

**Important:** NRCS State Offices shall ensure that the correct lookup table is used for signup 20. Use of the incorrect table may result in errors and terminated contracts.

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**D**

**Reviewing  
Subfactor N5b  
WESL**

For signup 16, the State Technical Committee, in consultation with NRCS, developed a Wind Erosion Soils List (WESL) that contained map units that have the dominant component of a soil that formed in organic or volcanic material. These soils have material in the surface layer that can become airborne and have a high potential of being suspended in air during wind events. WESL was reviewed and modified, if needed, before signup 18.

To prepare for signup 20, an NRCS soil scientist shall review and correct WESL if needed. After review of WESL, NRCS shall:

- label the list as "Signup 20 WESL"
- provide a copy of the list to the applicable NRCS Field Office by November 1, 1999.

After the new WESL labeled "Signup 20 WESL" is received in the NRCS Field Office, the District Conservationist shall write "Signup 18 WESL" on WESL used for signup 18.

**Important:** Do not destroy or discard WESL used for signup 18. Maintain a copy in the NRCS Field Office until further notice.

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**E**

**PC-Based EBI  
Worksheet**

One PC-based EBI worksheet program is being developed. No other programs are authorized.

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## Notice CRP-345

### 8 CP25, Rare and Declining Habitat

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**Recommending  
CP25, Rare and  
Declining  
Habitat**

2-CRP, Exhibit 9, provides that NRCS, in consultation with State Technical Committee, may develop and recommend technical restoration specifications that will cost-effectively restore and maintain specific rare and declining habitat through enrollment in CP25.

**Note:** See 2-CRP, Exhibit 9.

To be effective for signup 20, State specifications for a specific CP25 practice **must be received by Director of Conservation Operations Division, NRCS, National Office**, by COB November 1, 1999, for review and approval by DAFP. Service Centers shall not offer CP25's until the practice is approved by DAFP in writing.

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### 9 Action

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A

**Service Center  
Action**

Service Centers shall take action according to the following table.

Step	Action
1	Make preparation for CRP signup 20 a high priority when setting workload priorities and scheduling office activities.
2	Ensure that CRP-2's and CRP-1's are completed with the correct signup number according to paragraph 3.
3	Ensure that all signup 18 conservation plans are completed and approved according to paragraph 6 and Notice CRP-336.
4	Provide the local NRCS Office with a copy of this notice.

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## Notice CRP-345

### 9 Action (Continued)

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#### B

**State FSA Office Action** State Offices shall take action according to the following table.

Step	Action
1	Make preparation for CRP signup 20 a high priority when setting workload priorities and scheduling office activities.
2	Immediately begin reviewing C/S rates according to paragraph 2.
3	Ensure that all Service Centers are aware there will be no State ranking plan for signup 20.
4	Ensure that all signup 18 conservation plans are completed and approved according to paragraph 6 and Notice CRP-336.
5	Meet with the appropriate agencies and submit the State wildlife cover options developed for subfactor N1a <b>to be received by November 1, 1999</b> , according to paragraph 7.
6	Meet with the appropriate agencies and submit the developed yes/no matrix table for subfactor N1b <b>to be received by November 1, 1999</b> , according to paragraph 7.

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#### C

**State NRCS Office Action** NRCS State Offices shall take action according to the following table.

Step	Action
1	Meet with the appropriate agencies to assist in the development of yes/no matrix table for subfactor N1b according to paragraph 7.
2	Meet with the appropriate agencies to assist in the development of the State wildlife cover options for subfactor N1a according to paragraph 7.
3	Submit recommendations for CP25's <b>by COB November 1, 1999</b> , according to paragraph 8.
4	Ensure that all NRCS Field Offices are aware there will be no State ranking plan for signup 20.
5	Ensure that all NRCS Field Offices use the correct N2b, N2c, and N5a lookup tables for signup 20.

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### 10 Concurrence

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#### A

**NRCS National Office Concurrence** NRCS has concurred with this notice.

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**Key Completion Dates**

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Key dates in preparing for signup 20 are identified in this table.

Action	Completion Date
Complete and approve all conservation plans according to paragraph 6 and Notice CRP-336.	August 30, 1999
Approve and enter all eligible signup 18 CRP-1's into System/36.	September 30, 1999
Complete review of subfactor N1b cover/matrix and submit to CEPD for review and approval according to paragraph 7.	November 1, 1999
Complete review of subfactor N1a cover and submit to CEDP for review and approval according to paragraph 7.	November 1, 1999
Submit recommendations for CP25's according to paragraph 8.	November 1, 1999
Review and update all C/S rates, if applicable, according to paragraph 2.	January 1, 2000

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